

Tom Horne
Superintendent

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ARIZONA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

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STATE SUPERINTENDENT HORNE ANNOUNCES 68 OF 81 UNDERPERFORMING SCHOOLS IMPROVED TEST SCORES: STATE TO HAVE ONLY 13 FAILING SCHOOLS

PHOENIX (Friday, October 15, 2004) - Tom Horne, State Superintendent of Public Instruction, today announced unexpectedly large test score gains among underperforming schools.

Horne explained: "If a school is underperforming for three years, it is designated as 'failing to meet academic standards' and is subject to state intervention. Last year, there were 81 schools that had been underperforming for two years in a row and faced the possibility of becoming failing schools. However, 68 of those schools improved their test scores sufficiently to shed the underperforming label, leaving only 13 schools that are failing to meet academic standards. Following a site visit, and possible appeals, these schools face direct state intervention."

Horne added: "Failing schools face state intervention at three possible levels: mild, moderate, and intense. Mild requires continued monitoring. Moderate mandates that there would be some required areas where the state would help the school. Intense means the principal and some teachers could be replaced and would report to the state rather than to the school district. Involvement by other school districts, charter schools, or private companies, are also options under applicable legislation."

Horne also spoke about the continuous improvement model for Arizona's accountability system: "Our system is based on the business model of 'continuous improvement.' Our schools have been improving, but are not yet at a satisfactory level. If they continue to improve, they will meet that goal. If some of the schools do not continue to improve, then the number of failing schools will increase. In the meantime, it is desirable that the State is working with a small number of failing schools, so that it can devote concentrated attention, and perfect methods that then may have to be applied to larger numbers of schools."

Horne credited the unexpectedly large improvement in tests scores in underperforming schools to two factors: "The formula for determining achievement profiles did not change this past year. Therefore, all of the progress in the underperforming schools was due to higher test scores. Teachers and principals at those schools worked hard to increase students' proficiencies in reading, writing, and mathematics, which resulted in higher test scores. In addition, there have been a lot of positive reports about the success of Department of Education Solutions Teams, working with the underperforming schools, and these higher test scores give objective confirmation of those positive reports."

The numbers of schools in each category are: failing to meet academic standards (pending site visit) 13; underperforming 31; performing 825; highly performing 188; excelling 133. The specific schools in each category are posted on the Department's website, www.ade.az.gov.

In addition, this is the first year that extremely small schools and alternative schools will receive achievement profiles. Small schools are those with less than 16 students per grade level. Profiles for approximately 300 small schools and 130 alternative schools will be posted on November 3, 2004.

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